AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

LEVERAGING DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT THROUGH INCLUSION:

ADVANTAGES, DISADVANTAGES, AND TAKING ADVANTAGE

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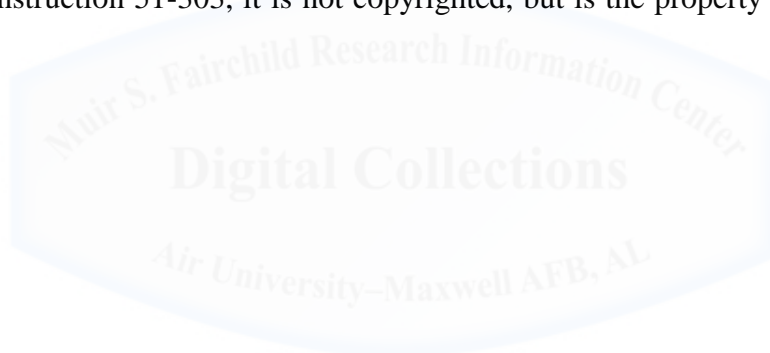
ABSTRACT

An Air Force Squadron Officer College instructor once informed her class, "My squadron commander wanted me in his organization purely for diversity reasons." The faces of her students ranged from shocked to uncomfortable, given that an African American female just informed them that she was in the squadron as an "instrument" of diversity. It was not until she concluded with the following statement that her students found relief and amusement: "And what better way for an Alabama Crimson Tide fan to get diversity of thought in his organization than to include an Auburn Tigers fan?" This example, however humorous, highlights the prevalent perception of what diversity means for many in the Air Force. While the Air Force seeks to attain "diversity of thought," many of its policies focus on demographic diversity without providing a clear picture of how it relates to cognitive diversity. Perhaps more important is the Air Force's ability to leverage diversity through inclusion. To achieve an environment that successfully balances and leverages cognitive diversity through inclusion, the Air Force must establish dedicated resources to explore and develop cognitive-centric programs and measures, create tools to assess inclusiveness, and educate leaders on managing diverse environments. This paper begins with definitions for diversity and inclusion and discusses how demographic diversity and cognitive diversity are related. Next, it discusses the advantages and disadvantages of diversity and the importance of seeking balance in order to maximize inclusiveness. Then, it examines whether or not current Air Force policy supports leveraging cognitive diversity and how the Air Force currently measures and assesses diversity and inclusion. Finally, it provides recommendations for improving policy to refocus Air Force diversity efforts, developing inclusion assessment tools for leadership at all levels, and educating leaders on effectively managing a diverse environment and cultivating inclusiveness within that environment.

DEFINING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Dr. Roosevelt Thomas defined diversity as "the differences, similarities, and related tensions that exist in any mixture."[1] This simple definition seems to belie the complexity inherently associated with the concept. When expounding on this definition, Dr. Thomas notes that these "differences" and "similarities" are not limited to physical demographics.[2] While race and gender may be the primary demographics often associated with diversity, they are not representative of the entire concept. There are many different lenses through which to view diversity, many of which involve non-physical characteristics or attributes. Nevertheless, the frequent association of diversity with race and gender often leads people to think that diversity is about reaching quotas for demographic representation. As such, diversity is often incorrectly associated with affirmative action, a program meant to prevent or reverse the effects of discrimination. Furthermore, diversity is not synonymous with equal opportunity, which is another program targeted to prevent or respond to discrimination.[3] Rather, diversity is the state of variety within a system that, when leveraged properly, may improve the performance of the system. That said, another important factor to consider in Dr. Thomas' definition concerns the tensions that result from the differences and similarities within a system. Overcoming these tensions or barriers creates an environment conducive to harnessing diversity through the power of inclusion.

Inclusiveness, then, is the quality of involving all aspects or items that make up a group or whole and necessarily requires an understanding of the elements that make up the group.[4] Here lies another point of complexity surrounding diversity and inclusion. Understanding the parts of the whole and how they interact is the foundation to successfully achieving inclusivity. This process involves analyzing any barriers or tensions that may inhibit all parts from being

fully involved or engaged within the group. Thus, this understanding goes beyond knowing the

physical differences of each component to comprehending how those differences may contribute

to cognitive differences driven by individual personality or experiences. Therefore, the difficulty

or complexity related to the process of achieving inclusiveness is dependent not just on the size

of the group, but also on the level of diversity (factoring in all types) within the group. Of note,

while it seems inherent that a highly diverse group (in any given characteristic measure or

assessment) may either be highly inclusive or not very inclusive, it is also possible for a group

that is not very diverse to be either very inclusive or not inclusive as well. The real challenge for

organizations such as the United States Air Force that seek to leverage diversity through

inclusion is ensuring that its members understand these concepts and the importance in driving

towards this goal.

With regard to ensuring that its members understand the importance of diversity and

inclusion, Air Force policy codifies diversity as a military necessity.[5] The term "military

necessity" can have many different contexts. The armed forces usually associate the term with

the law of war; in which context, it denotes something essential to obtaining a "legitimate

military goal."[6] While some cite past military successes with demographically homogeneous

forces to argue that diversity is not essential to mission accomplishment, these arguments fail to

account for time as an important contextual factor. To sustain success, forces must adapt to

changes in the environment over time and account for emerging concepts that challenge typical

ways of thought. To this end, diversity delivers "an aggregation of strengths, perspectives, and

capabilities that transcends individual contributions" and improves warfighting capabilities.[7]

Thus, diversity drives the evolution that allows forces to adapt to changes in the operational

environment, which is essential to mission accomplishment. As such, diversity does indeed fit

the definition of military necessity in the context of warfighting. Furthermore, the Air Force labels diversity as a national security imperative or a capability that must be leveraged to surpass those of any adversaries in order to preserve national security.[8] The criticality of these implications requires an in-depth understanding of what precisely diversity and inclusion mean to the Air Force and how these concepts enhance performance.

The first step towards creating an understanding of diversity and inclusion and how they may enhance performance is to define the terms within the context of the organization. The Air Force defines diversity as "a composite of individual characteristics, experiences, and abilities consistent with the Air Force Core Values and the Air Force Mission."[9] These qualities may include a number of hidden attributes, such as personal life experiences, socioeconomic background, and spiritual perspectives, in addition to clearly visible attributes such as ethnicity and gender.[10] These characteristics, by virtue of their distinct qualities, imply that different types of diversity exist. As outlined in Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-7001, the different categories of diversity include demographic diversity, cognitive/behavior diversity, organizational/structural diversity, and global diversity.[11] Demographic diversity, which encompasses numerous "inherent [or] socially defined personal characteristics," is generally the easiest to measure and, as mentioned above, is usually what most people associate with the term "diversity."[12] However, understanding cognitive/behavior diversity is critical to understanding the tensions and barriers that may prevent inclusion. Cognitive diversity refers to the "differences in styles of work, thinking, learning, and personality" and is synonymous with the term "diversity of thought."[13] According to former Secretary of the Air Force, Deborah Lee James, this what the Air Force is looking to leverage in order to enhance performance.[14]

In spite of the former secretary's assertion, many of the initiatives recently launched by the Air Force seem to focus more on demographic diversity than cognitive diversity. This revelation calls into question whether or not there is a correlation between demographic diversity and cognitive diversity. The Air Force instruction addressing diversity does not provide an answer to this question in terms of defining the relationship between the two. Indeed, the relationship between the two is difficult to capture in a simple definition. However, numerous studies and analogies exist to help explain this relationship. In his book, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies,* Scott E. Page gives an example of the differences in how Micronesians and Americans (two different demographics) perceive spatial orientation (a cognitive process).[15] While American culture perceives navigation based on an individual moving towards a fixed location, Micronesian culture perceives the individual as stationary and elements of the environment moving around and towards it. Additionally, Page notes that some physical demographics, such as race, depend on internal (how a person sees oneself), external (how the world sees a person), and expressive (how an individual presents him/herself) factors.[16] These perceptions are all based on cognition and affect experiences and thought processes.[17] Such is the link between demographic and cognitive diversity. The next question, then, is how does the Air Force define inclusion to support leveraging cognitive diversity created through demographic diversity?

While AFI 36-7001 and the policy from which it originates includes extensive discussion regarding Air Force diversity, it provides minimal discussion on inclusion. Moreover, the definition provided in the glossary section does not paint a clear picture of how inclusion relates to diversity. Rather, it only states that inclusion gives individuals "challenging tasks, responsibility…, and support to grow in addition to "provid[ing] an opportunity for individuals

to be part of 'the team.'"[18]   However, the Headquarters Air Force Office of Personnel and

Manpower's Diversity and Inclusion Division (HAF/A1V) has adopted a clearer definition: "the

process of creating a culture where all members of an organization are free to make their fullest

contribution to the success of the group and where there are no artificial barriers to success."[19]

As with the general definition of inclusiveness, this definition suggests that inclusiveness may

exist outside of diversity. However, as it relates to the Air Force definition of diversity, this

definition implies that successfully creating an inclusive environment involves ensuring that

perceptions regarding demographic or cognitive differences do not create obstacles that prevent

the full and willing contribution of all members within a group. The Air Force pairs inclusion

with diversity as a military necessity and a national security imperative. In fact, as the definition

implies, inclusion is what enables an organization to access the benefits of diversity. And while

the benefits are numerous, the drawbacks of diversity also require attention.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF DIVERSITY

The many benefits that diversity provides are what inclusion seeks to leverage into

enhanced team performance. Numerous studies conducted over the years describe how diverse

environments can make an organization more productive in any given business model. In his

book, *Diversity and Complexity*, Scott Page analyzes the benefits of diversity from a scientific

perspective. According to Page, there are two universal, scientific causes at the root of all

benefits stemming from diversity. The first cause is "averaging," which "refers to the fact

that…lots of types [necessarily result in] some insurance."[20] Simply stated, increased diversity

within a group decreases "variation in performance," thereby creating "robustness" within a

system or organization.[21] Page points out that financial advisors use this argument to advocate

for diversified investment portfolios.[22] The second cause refers to "diminishing returns to type" or "the fact that in many contexts, the marginal return (in productivity, profits, or fun) decreases" given the prevalence of one particular type.[23] Regarding diversity within an organization, this concept implies that the overabundance of one particular mindset or personality will reduce the effectiveness of the organization. Therefore, the two causes presented above provide the basis for the many benefits that result from an inclusive and diverse environment.

Perhaps one of the greatest benefits that diversity and inclusion provide is enhanced problem-solving. As previously mentioned, a variety of cultural backgrounds brings unique experiences, perceptions, and cognitive processes to an organization that might be useful when framing problems. Acknowledging and leveraging these perspectives may result not only in more potential solutions to a given problem but also more creativity within those solutions.[24] Within the Air Force, problem-solving is essential to leadership and mission accomplishment. As part of the joint warfighting force, the Air Force must navigate through many "wicked problems" that require detailed planning and analysis. A diverse environment allows Airmen "to maximize individual strengths and to combine individual abilities and perspectives" in order to frame such problems from multiple viewpoints, develop creative and unique solutions, and ultimately, successfully achieve the mission.[25] Thus, the advantage diversity provides by enriching problem-solving capabilities is critical to ensuring that the Air Force can effectively and efficiently carry out its mission. However, the benefits of diversity and inclusion are not just limited to capability improvements.

One advantage that diversity and inclusion deliver through prevention involves guarding an organization against "groupthink." Merriam-Webster defines groupthink as "a pattern of thought characterized by self-deception, forced manufacture of consent, and conformity to group

values and ethics."[26] Groupthink is a dangerous tendency because it not only inhibits effective

problem-solving habits, but also hinders good decision-making. The 1960 Bay of Pigs debacle

and the 1986 space shuttle *Challenger* disaster are both poignant examples of this fact.[27] Greater

diversity offers the potential for more significant variation in perspectives and approaches, which

are essential to finding the best course of action to any problem. However, diversity itself is not

sufficient in order to counter groupthink. In order to effectively combat groupthink, individuals

must be comfortable with communicating their views and have the opportunity to freely

contribute to the group. Such is the nature of a diverse environment that is highly inclusive. The

Air Force environment is often prone to groupthink due to the culture of conformity that is

inherent in any military or highly disciplined organization. However, cultivating inclusiveness

ensures that any institution can take measures to avoid groupthink, such as seeking outside

opinions or purposefully selecting individuals to advocate opposing viewpoints.[28] An

organization that can successfully leverage diversity and inclusion's ability to prevent groupthink

actually positions itself for creative and innovative thought.

Diversity and inclusion naturally foster creativity by presenting an environment that

values and encourages "originality of thought."[29] "Workforce diversity increases creativity

within a company because heterogeneous groups are cross-fertilizing one another within the

organization."[30] Specifically, diversity and inclusion stimulate creativity by providing a greater

number of options to any given problem and by allowing "members [to] share uniquely held

information."[31] This creativity is a necessary precondition for successful innovation. Therefore,

it is no surprise that the Air Force aims to capitalize on diversity and inclusion. As prescribed in

2013, the U.S. Air Force aims to become "The World's Greatest Air Force—Powered by

Airmen, Fueled by Innovation."[32] The Air Force insists that innovation is the core of mission

success and is, in fact, the foundation upon which Air Force history and culture stand. Accordingly, in order to sustain a culture of innovation, the Air Force embraces diversity and inclusion as a way of promoting creative thought. In doing so, the Air Force as an organization is not the only benefactor of this advantage.

Workplace diversity not only benefits the organization as a whole but also provides the opportunity for personal growth among its employees. Exposure to different cultures, mindsets, and ideas creates an environment for individuals to expand their perspectives, grow intellectually, and gain a more comprehensive understanding of their working environment. According to some studies, "spending time with culturally diverse co-workers can slowly break down the subconscious barriers of ethnocentrism and xenophobia, encouraging employees to be more well-rounded members of society."[33] This development may lead to more open-minded individuals, which subsequently leads to a more inclusive environment. Furthermore, such an inclusive environment fosters feelings of appreciation that breed a sense of devotion and belonging.[34] Such a benefit is advantageous for an organization, such as the Air Force, looking to "attract and retain" a diverse talent pool in order to maintain a "competitive advantage" over adversaries or rivals.[35] Consequently, organizations that value diversity and inclusion may reap the benefits of a gratified workforce, which may include more effective and efficient workers. The resulting increase in productivity leads to "higher performance and increased customer satisfaction," which, in turn, boosts profitability through customer retention.[36] An organization may then use this success to attract additional diversified talent in order to contribute to its overall performance.

While diversity by itself is advantageous, it also presents some challenges and disadvantages. For example, as implied by Dr. Thomas's definition, increased diversity in the

workplace may also increase conflict as varying viewpoints often create tension. These tensions

are the result of a lack of understanding or an inability to reconcile differences.[37] Though not all

conflict is bad (the fact that divergent viewpoints exists can be the basis for a benefit as

described previously), unresolved tension may inhibit progress. The challenge then becomes

how to acknowledge these differences, encourage respect for the differences, and promote unity

within the organization.[38] In an organization whose culture is steeped in conformity, such as the

U.S. Air Force, this is arguably the most difficult challenge to overcome. One factor that makes

dealing with such an undertaking particularly problematic is resistance to change. Poor change

orientation within a workforce may result in negativity and destructive behaviors, such as

stereotyping and discrimination, which can affect employee relations, damage workplace morale,

and hinder productivity.[39] Even so, greater challenges exists that may further exacerbate the

effects of increased conflict within a diverse environment.

Arguably the most significant challenge attributed to managing a diverse work

environment is communication. People with different cultures and cognitive processes may not

communicate or process information in the same way. This disconnect may act as a significant

barrier towards achieving the desired outcome. In studies that assess the performance of various

groups, "homogenous groups [tend] to outperform culturally diverse groups…where there are

serious communication issues [that] make it more difficult for everybody to make optimal

contributions to the group effort."[40] In essence, when members feel they are not understood or

that the group is unwilling to make an effort to adequately communicate in their terms, these

members may withdraw from the group and become non-effective in future interactions.

Findings from a 1989 study showed high attrition of these members from their respective

organizations and estimated that the decrease in cognitive diversity resulted in an average annual

profit loss of three million dollars."[41] Therefore, ineffective communication stemming from a

diverse environment may actually prevent inclusiveness. Furthermore, communication

challenges presented by a diverse environment may hamper a group's ability to agree on a plan

of action, resulting in conflicts that impede progress and consume valuable time.[42] Likewise, the

volume of ideas that stem from a diverse environment and the desire to account for all of them

(over-communication) may also hinder progress. Consequently, as the advantages and

challenges that diversity presents converge, leaders must find an equilibrium that leverages the

strengths while mitigating the challenges.

Balance is the key to maintaining the benefits diversity and inclusion provide while

avoiding some of the drawbacks diversity alone may pose. Hence, to sustain a balance, leaders

must carefully and continuously manage their diverse environments. Managing diversity

requires more than acknowledging differences. "It involves recognizing the value of

differences…and promoting inclusiveness."[43] If the challenges diversity presents are not

handled properly or balanced against the benefits, the work environment may suffer and an

organization may fail to reach optimal performance potential. This dilemma implies that an

Aristotelian mean exists representing the optimal balance of diversity that fosters optimal

inclusion and thereby maximizes a group's potential. While too little diversity can limit the

ideas and originality flowing from a group, an abundance of diversity has the potential to impede

progress through an inability to arrive at a consensus. Answering the question of how to find the

balance between the two requires consideration for how to measure and assess diversity and

inclusion.

MEASURING DIVERSITY AND ASSESSING INCLUSION

Achieving balance in diversity of thought through inclusion in the United States Air Force is a critical, yet complex goal. This complexity lies in determining measurements that an organization can use to assess the levels of cognitive diversity. Furthermore, in order to take advantage of the benefits cognitive diversity provides, organizations must determine a method to assess inclusiveness. As previously discussed, a correlation exists between demographic diversity and cognitive diversity. However, accurately measuring cognitive diversity extends beyond simply considering demographic diversity data. Still, measuring cognitive diversity can utilize demographics along with a larger breadth and depth of human characteristics, such as personalities, intelligence, or personal experiences. Each of these qualities and experiences may become data points to determine the level of cognitive diversity within a group. Capturing and analyzing this data may be a complicated process, but doing so can provide a clearer picture of what a company needs to maximize performance. That said, organizations must not only look to achieve a balance in cognitive diversity but also look to assess inclusiveness in order to leverage this diversity. The question now remains: what is the best way to measure cognitive diversity?

The first step in determining how to measure cognitive diversity is to develop a framework that identifies the appropriate data to evaluate in order to produce desired outcomes. In short, organizations must ascertain the right data to measure and analyze in order to obtain the ideal feedback that will address the problem at hand. Jeffrey Pfeffer states in his book, *Leadership BS: Fixing Workplaces and Careers One Truth at a Time*, that "measuring the wrong thing is often worse than measuring nothing" because focusing on the inappropriate data may distract from the real goal an organization is trying to achieve.[44] For example, the Air Force captures demographics as a primary measure of diversity. However, in spite of the correlation

between cognitive diversity and demographic diversity, demographic measures alone do not account for other human characteristics, experiences, and thought processes that are representative of cognitive diversity.

In his book, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*, Scott E. Page provides a detailed framework that may assist in capturing the complexity associated with measuring cognitive diversity. Basically, Page compares cognitive characteristics and experiences to tools in a toolbox.[45] A complete toolbox "consists of all possible knowledge, skills, abilities, heuristics, interpretations, and perspectives that [any one] person might acquire."[46] An individual's toolbox consists only of what that person has acquired to date.[47] Though an ideal framework looks at every possible "tool" an individual may obtain, this may be an unrealistic place to start given the sheer number of "tools" that could exist. Instead, an organization may tailor this framework into a scalable format that designs the toolbox to contain specific, desired capabilities and characteristics that could maximize productivity. Because an organization may not view every skill or ability with the same value depending on performance goals, it may choose to prioritize essential "tools" first as it continues to develop a detailed and comprehensive toolkit. For example, a person's ability to sing may not have the same importance to the organization as an individual's ability to perform mathematics. Identifying the "tools" in each person's toolkit takes considerable resources, but with this framework, a measure of cognitive diversity can take shape within an organization.

After developing a comprehensive framework that identifies skills, perspectives, and capabilities, an organization can measure cognitive diversity on multiple levels. Using this "toolbox" framework, organizations can associate a set of cognitive skills unique to each employee or a particular sub-section of the organization. Nonetheless, some may contend that

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this process is unnecessary in that cognitive diversity inherently already exists in any particular group. However, if an organization is to leverage cognitive diversity to its advantage, it must determine what characteristics it requires, how much diversity exists among these attributes, and how this measure correlates with the organization's performance. The toolbox framework offers the capability to analyze similarities and differences between these cognitive skills in order to provide these answers.[48]

Determining a list of detailed and specific characteristics an organization requires (or desires) to achieve optimal performance is the first and greatest challenge in measuring cognitive diversity. Furthermore, these traits should contribute a unique value not common to a majority of people and be capable of enhancing performance. For example, Page notes that some skills, such as addition and subtraction, are widely held and offer little gain towards diversity.[49] However, a unique skill, like the ability to comprehend compound interest, potentially demonstrates a significant cognitive difference that may prove helpful.[50] Likewise, using an individual's Meyers-Briggs type indicator (as it pertains to differences in cognitive perception) as a particular "tool" can give insight into cognitive diversity levels. In a multi-tiered organization such as the U.S. Air Force, this "toolbox" framework allows units at all levels to develop tailored measures for cognitive diversity and identify potential areas that require balance. Furthermore, Page offers three additional detailed methods for analyzing cognitive diversity among people that go beyond the scope of this paper; however, these methods highlight the science and methodology to measuring and assessing cognitive diversity beyond just demographic data.[51] Ultimately, using this "toolbox" framework provides data points with which to correlate trends in organization performance. However, this is only one part of

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assessing whether or not the appropriate level of diversity exists for an organization to maximize its potential.

Obtaining a balance in cognitive diversity has no value if the environment is not inclusive. The ability to assess inclusiveness allows leaders to capitalize on the benefits of cognitive diversity. As discussions on the importance of diversity grew at the turn of the century, inclusiveness became the next "philosophical evolution" that workplaces had to address.[52] Thus, the Inclusion Index TM emerged from the United Kingdom as an early attempt to assess workplace inclusion. This index utilizes a ten-dimension framework based on the following factors: senior managers, immediate managers, values, recruitment, promotion/progression & development, fitting in, bullying/harassment, dialogue, organizational belonging, and emotional well-being.[53] A subsequent study shows that this index is successful in its intent to provide insight into what might inhibit inclusion in an organization and where to direct efforts in order to improve inclusivity.[54] Additionally, the United States Government utilizes a similar assessment tool called the New Inclusion Quotient (New IQ), which is derived from Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) data. As a whole, the FEVS "provide[s]valuable insight into challenges agency leaders face in ensuring the Federal Government has an effective civilian workforce and how well they are responding."[55] The New IQ index combines numerous factors to assess five "habits" of inclusion: fairness, openness, cooperation, support, and empowerment.[56] This assessment is then used to affect change within an organization aimed at creating a more inclusive environment.

Given the information above, it may come as a surprise that the U.S. Air Force does not currently have a method to measure cognitive diversity and inclusion. While the Air Force does measure demographic diversity, it does not provide insight on how these numbers relate to

cognitive diversity or correlate to mission effectiveness. Indeed, it would be quite difficult to assess these factors for the Air Force as a whole. Rather, it would prove more beneficial to evaluate these factors at lower levels based on the particular mission of a given unit. To this end, the opportunity exists to adopt a framework as discussed above for measuring cognitive diversity and assessing inclusion that is scalable to any given unit or community. Without such a framework and a pool of resources to adequately address this complex issue, the preponderance of Air Force members may continue to perceive diversity only in terms of demographics and thereby fail to achieve its desire for inclusive diversity of thought. Air Force senior leaders recognize that cognitive diversity and inclusion are necessary for mission success. The question now becomes: exactly how can the Air Force posture its units to achieve an environment that successfully balances and leverages cognitive diversity through inclusion?

RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively leverage cognitive diversity through inclusion, the U.S. Air Force must refocus its diversity policy towards intellectual and cognitive based programs, adopt a method to assess inclusion, and educate leaders at all levels on how to manage a diverse environment.   The first step towards these ends requires updating policy and instructions on diversity and inclusion. Air Force Policy Document (AFPD) 36-70 and AFI 36-7001 were last updated in 2010 and 2012 respectively. The Air Force should update both to include HAF/A1V's enhanced definition of inclusion and how it relates to diversity. Additionally, both should contain discussion on how demographic diversity and cognitive diversity are linked while emphasizing that the ultimate goal of Air Force diversity and inclusion initiatives are to promote an environment where all members can maximize their contributions. These changes may not only help clarify the Air

Force's position on diversity but also provide the basis for training that can dispel inaccurate perceptions of what diversity initiatives seek to achieve. Furthermore, Air Force policy should dictate the use of the "toolbox" method to measure cognitive diversity as described earlier and specify how to correlate these measures with organizational performance. Finally, Air Force policy and instruction should prescribe a method to assess inclusion similar to the New IQ index in the FEVS but tailored to fit the Air Force environment. These policy changes will not only help to clarify the intent of Air Force diversity and inclusion initiatives but also provide a detailed framework for leveraging cognitive diversity. Still, the challenge remains as to how the Air Force should implement these changes.

While updating and developing policy is a tedious process that requires considerable attention, implementation of policy can be even more complex and arduous. For example, if the Air Force adopts the "toolbox" method to measure cognitive diversity, it will need to identify what cognitive skills and traits it desires in order to maximize mission effectiveness and performance. As mentioned, the intent is not only to assess cognitive diversity across the entire Air Force, but to provide a comprehensive list of "tools" for unit-level leaders to consider when building their own "toolboxes" to measure cognitive diversity and correlate it with unit performance. To identify these traits, the Air Force may consider partnering career field specialists with behavior experts to determine the cognitive skillsets applicable to leadership in general and those specific to a particular mission set. Aside from identifying the traits for measurement, there must be some means of assessing these traits in individuals. Some tools, such as the aforementioned Meyers-Briggs type indicator (MBTI) test, already exists and are available for use. However, the Air Force must formalize the use of such assessments and develop new surveys to assess the cognitive traits of individuals. In order to capture individual

results from these surveys and make them readily available for commanders, the Air Force

should include these results on the individual's Single Uniform Request Format (SURF)

document in the same way that it captures demographics. Furthermore, just as the Air Force

policy and instruction require periodic updates, the desired cognitive skillsets will require

periodic review as the Air Force mission evolves. With a foundation for capturing and

measuring cognitive diversity, the Air Force can then focus on ways to ensure that these

capabilities are properly leveraged by assessing inclusion.

In order to assess inclusion, the Air Force should build from proven government surveys

to develop a tool capable of providing leaders the insights necessary to affect change within a

unit. The subset of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey that produces the New IQ index

provides an optimal starting point for this effort. Currently, the survey focuses only on

government civilian working environments whereas an Air Force solution must include factors

for both civilian and military members.[57] To supplement the survey and assist commanders with

affecting change, the Air Force should make provisions for trained diversity and inclusion

specialists to provide in-depth evaluations and actionable recommendations on how to make the

work environment more inclusive. In the end, the information these resources provide will allow

commanders at all levels to take steps toward effectively leveraging the collective diversity

capital within their organizations. Still, the Air Force must go beyond merely providing these

resources.

In addition to providing commanders the resources for measuring cognitive diversity and

assessing inclusion, the Air Force must also provide formal training to ensure that leaders

understand the available resources and use them appropriately. It is important that the Air Force

extend these resources and training to leaders at all levels since units have varying missions and

often require different capabilities. As part of this training, leaders should receive an understanding of Air Force diversity and inclusion initiatives to include discussion on the relationship between demographic and cognitive diversity. Additionally, training should address how the Air Force measures cognitive diversity in order to leverage its benefits and how to use assessment resources to drive organizational change. Specifically, training should cover how commanders can use existing intellectual platforms and resources to expand the cognitive toolkits of the individuals in their units and address issues with unit cohesion. Lastly, training must address how commanders can strategically communicate the importance of cognitive diversity and inclusion such that all members integrate this awareness into their day-to-day interactions. Ultimately, providing this training to leaders across the Air Force is part of transforming diversity and inclusion from a strategic concept into operational action.

In fact, the overall goal of all of the recommendations discussed above is to "operationalize" diversity and inclusion.[58] Operationalizing diversity and inclusions means preparing leaders to actively manage diverse environments and ensure that they can address the tensions and barriers that may inhibit inclusivity. To successfully operationalize the concepts discussed in this paper, the Air Force must establish dedicated resources and personnel to develop, manage, and facilitate these initiatives. In recognition of this need, HAF/A1V has proposed creating a "Diversity and Inclusion Center of Excellence" (D&I COE) that would be responsible for "coordinating [with] units at multiple levels and providing requisite education/training and development for Air Force leaders at each level."[59] As part of HAF/A1's Diversity and Inclusion Division, this organization could also help determine talent shortfalls and focus recruiting and outreach programs to bolster the force where it is needed. For example, geographic location is currently a significant driver for many of the Air Force's outreach

programs.[60] This type of "stovepiped" recruiting limits the Air Force's ability to attract talent for total force accessions.[61] The D&I COE would provide evaluation and analysis of outreach programs to account for all lenses of diversity so that the Air Force may make "data-informed" decisions regarding recruiting and retention.[62] Furthermore, the D&I COE would provide a centralized office to manage inclusion assessments and develop the requisite training and education to assist commanders with putting inclusion initiatives into practice. In doing so, a D&I COE can shape the current force and provide dedicated focus on building and maintaining a cognitively diverse future force capable of enhanced mission performance.

CONCLUSION

Arguably, the United States Air Force leads the Department of Defense when it comes to emphasizing the importance of diversity and inclusion. However, misperceptions abound regarding what exactly the Air Force is seeking with diversity and inclusion initiatives. This confusion is due in part to the fact that, in spite of Air Force leaders' emphasis on "diversity of thought," much of Air Force policy concentrates on demographic diversity without providing a clear picture of how it relates to cognitive diversity. Additionally, Air Force policy and instruction lack an emphasis on the role inclusion plays in leveraging diversity capital into enhanced performance. To create a culture that successfully balances and leverages cognitive diversity through inclusion, the Air Force must establish dedicated resources to explore and develop cognitive-centric programs and measures, create tools to assess inclusiveness, and educate leaders on managing diverse environments. To that end, this paper discussed the definitions of diversity and inclusion and how demographic diversity and cognitive diversity are related. Next, it addressed the advantages and disadvantages of diversity and the importance of

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seeking balance in order to maximize inclusiveness. Then, it examined how the Air Force

currently measures and assesses diversity and inclusion and whether or not current Air Force

policy and data-recording supports leveraging cognitive diversity. Finally, it provided

recommendations for improving policy and resources to refocus Air Force diversity efforts,

developing inclusion assessments tools for leadership at all levels, and educating leaders on

effectively managing and cultivating an environment of inclusiveness. With these

recommendations, the United States Air Force can move closer towards its vision of becoming

the world's greatest Air Force, powered by diverse talent and fueled by innovation resulting from

a highly inclusive environment.

ENDNOTES

1. Thomas, R. Roosevelt. *Building on the Promise of Diversity: How We can Move to the Next Level in Our Workplaces, Our Communities, and Our Society*, AMACOM Div American Mgmt Assn, 2006, xi.
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